



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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August 29, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRENT SCOWCROFT
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Issues Paper on the Sahel

Attached is a memorandum describing the drought situation in West Africa, the nature of the US assistance effort, and the principal problems and choices that confront us there.

George S. Springsteen
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Executive Secretary

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THE SAHEL

BACKGROUND

World attention has been focused on the drought in the Sahel (Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, Chad and the Gambia) since the fall of 1972. The rains that year were too light and too poorly distributed to produce a crop sufficient to feed the people, most of whom are subsistence farmers or nomadic livestock breeders. Pasture land, poor during the best of times, became barren. The level of the water tables dropped; the level of lakes and rivers fell precipitously. As a result of this natural calamity, some 20-25 million people faced starvation, and the livestock herds, vital to the economy of these poor countries, were threatened with extinction. The 1973 sahelian rainy season was also poor. The rains have begun this year, but it is yet too early to tell whether the drought has effectively broken.

Somewhat belatedly the nations of the world rallied to the aid of the Sahel. Foodstuffs have come from every corner of the globe. Medicines, clothing, tents, and other emergency supplies have been furnished. The United States, with approximately 40% of the total, has been the largest donor throughout the emergency period. To date we have committed 606,000 tons of foodstuffs worth approximately \$120 million and have given another \$29.7 million in non-food assistance. France, Canada, the Common Market, the Peoples Republic of China, and the Soviet Union, have all provided significant amounts of food or non-food assistance. The rapid action of the world community has served to prevent mass starvation. Some lives have been certainly lost, but not nearly as many as the news media have suggested.

One of the greatest problems in the sahelian relief effort has been transport. Modern road systems in the Sahel are all but non-existent. For example, in Chad, a country the size of Texas, Oklahoma, and California combined, there are only about 170 miles of paved roads. Most of the Sahel is not served by railroads, and there is little water transportation. Thus, getting the food to the isolated and widely dispersed subhelian communities has been and continues to be the greatest challenge. All solutions have been tried, from trans-saharan truck convoys to airlifts and airdrops. With time, the donor community has gained experience and has learned to cope with the problem--but just barely. Until transportation infrastructure has been created, moving goods to the hinterland will be a continuing struggle.

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The problems of the Sahel are not solely the result of the 1972-1973 drought. Even in normal years, the Sahel is an exceedingly dry region, resembling some of the more arid areas in Arizona and New Mexico. Because of expanded health and veterinary services during the past several years, human and animal populations have reached the limits of the land's carrying capacity. If development programs aimed at increasing food production are not undertaken immediately and population planning instituted, the Sahel will remain a food deficit area. Since these countries are desperately poor, foodstuffs to make up these deficits would have to come from donations.

U.S. STRATEGY

Our first aim has been to feed the hungry. Before any thought could be given to ultimate solutions of the Sahel problem, the task at hand has been to avert starvation. This job is not over. Even if the harvest this year reaches normal per-acre yields, much land has been lost to production and past reserves are gone, so we expect the food deficit in the Sahel to persist for several more years.

Our strategy for the immediate post-drought period (recovery and rehabilitation phase) is to get the afflicted peoples off welfare and back to work growing their own food.

To do this we are helping to:

- construct grain storage facilities;
- make minor improvements in roads, river systems, and other transportation infrastructure;
- develop medical services for at-risk populations;
- furnish agricultural assistance; seeds, fertilizers, animal-drawn plows, and technical assistance;
- rebuild herds at a pace consistent with sound land utilization.

Our medium and long term development objectives are to assist the sahelian states reestablish the ecological equilibrium and adopt new and better agricultural methods in order to increase food production without degrading their fragile environment further.

The Niger National Cereals Program is representative of this sort of AID project. Our program inputs include:

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- production and distribution of high quality millet and sorghum seeds;
- field trial testing and adaptation of drought resistant varieties of cereals;
- extension services and demonstrations for the peasant farmers;
- expansion of credit and cooperative mechanisms.

In livestock projects, such as the one in Mali, we are assisting with:

- the introduction of new range management techniques and modern animal husbandry methods;
- opening new pasture areas in higher rainfall zones by tsetse fly control measures;
- expansion of credit facilities for marketing operations;
- support for government livestock services;
- mass training programs.

We hope that what we learn in projects like these can be put to use elsewhere. The Sahel can thus be a laboratory in which we can work on the problems of insufficient food production that exist worldwide.

THE SITUATION NOW

Sufficient food stocks are now in place, and the supply pipeline continues to flow, so that there is no present danger of starvation anywhere in the Sahel except in Chad. There, government inefficiency coupled with a precarious security situation (a low-grade insurgency has been going on in Chad since 1965, making much of the countryside insecure) have served to keep relief supplies from reaching some of the needy.

In areas of Mali, Mauritania, and Chad where it has not been possible to bring in supplies by other means, we and other donors are carrying out airlifts.

AID is in the process of building up its field staffs to carry out the medium and longer term development projects. At the beginning of the drought, AID had no bilateral programs in any of the sahelian countries and therefore no personnel. The ad hoc personnel arrangements that were made during the emergency period, are now being concluded and permanent staffs established in each of the sahelian countries. The recovery and rehabilitation phase projects are underway and are making good progress. For example we are:

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- planting trees in Niger to control erosion and fight desertification;
- helping build earthen catch-dams in Upper Volta;
- providing equipment for maintenance and repair of dirt roads in Mali;
- drilling and repairing village wells throughout the region;
- assisting with the refitting of boats and barges that will carry foodstuffs on the Niger River.

Congress recently appropriated an additional \$85 million for non-food relief and rehabilitation. Of this amount \$50 million is earmarked for the Sahel, \$10 million for Ethiopia, where drought is also a continuing problem, and the remaining \$25 million for drought areas in any part of Africa. This should be sufficient to fund requirements for the next 12 months.

ISSUES AND CHOICES

The major issue that we face is that of long term commitment. It will take a long and determined effort by the whole donor community to help the Sahel transform its agriculture and reach self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. The countries themselves will have to make some difficult socio-political adjustments. The Sahel, seen in this perspective, is but one of the areas of the world where continuing food deficits will be a major problem for decades to come.

We must also choose whether to make our assistance efforts primarily bilateral undertakings between ourselves and each of the sahelian governments, or to encourage the formation of a multidonor consortium to carry out this work. We believe that the latter approach is the more feasible. The sums of money involved will be far too great for us to produce alone. In addition, the other donor countries will be able to supply some of the much needed technical assistance. The capability of the Common Market countries to supply French-speaking technicians will be especially valuable. Since the Soviet Union and PRC are involved in sahelian assistance, opportunities may develop for cooperation with them, thus reinforcing, through cooperation in a humanitarian endeavor, the realization of detente.

Finally, we must make a decision on the capital investments that must be made in roads, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure if the Sahel is to become economically viable. The Congress has strongly implied that it will not look with favor upon large capital infrastructure expenditures in the future. But if other donors do not concentrate on this sector, we will have to decide whether

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E.O. 12958, as amended

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to try to bring the Congress around to funding this type of assistance.

NEXT STEPS

While the principal short-term objectives have been achieved in the Sahel, all has not gone as smoothly as we might have wished. Cooperation among donors, especially on the long term development program, needs to be improved. The need for donor cooperation has been recognized by everyone from the start. Nevertheless, there has been to date precious little movement toward establishing mechanisms and structures through which this sort of cooperation might be carried out. We are therefore exploring ways in which a consortium might be formed, perhaps under the auspices of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD or the World Bank. Assistance consortia are not a new idea, and there is no reason if we push hard that we cannot be successful in establishing one for the Sahel.

We will carry on the basic studies of the sahelian environment in order to develop the data needed to plan rational and viable development projects. The major study of sahelian development options on which a group at MIT has been working for over a year should be finished within the next two or three months.

Since the Sahel undertaking will extend over years and will be of such a magnitude, we should carry on regular consultations with the Congress, in order to keep the support base necessary to ensure appropriations in the years to come. It would, quite obviously, be unfortunate if we were to stimulate the formation of a sahelian development consortium and then find ourselves obliged to drop out of it because of funding difficulties.

We will also need to conduct an on-going public information campaign both in order to counter the charges of U.S. negligence in the face of the drought disaster and to maintain public support for our assistance expenditures. If the United States is to carry out its part of the global responsibility for seeing that the hungry are fed and helping the poor nations develop their production, we will have to have the support of the American people--because carrying out our responsibility will call for sacrifices from them. We have no doubt that the American people will be willing to accept these sacrifices if they understand fully the nature of the problem.